



## Game developers create multiple personalities

Why play one character in a game when you can play two or three or four, switching on the fly?

Clearly, that's the question game developers have been asking themselves, resulting in a bunch of multiple-personality games coming out this year.

"Shrek 2," published by Activision to coincide with the movie's release May 21, forces you to switch between four characters to use their special skills to continue.

I saw an example where you had to use Fiona's slow-motion "Matrix"-like time skill to slow down the action, then switch to Donkey to use his over-the-top power-kick to lower a bridge, then switch to Shrek to use his extra-strength throwing skills to knock down a pile of enemies on the other side of a river.

Other examples that aren't quite so cartoony: Atari's "Forgotten Realms" dungeon-crawler asks you to make quick switches between a stealthy rogue, beefy fighter or spell-throwing wizard.

"Sudeki," Microsoft Game Studios' dungeon-action role playing game due out for Xbox this spring, asks you to switch between anywhere from two to four characters to use their skills and even combo with others for super-moves.

It's kind of like playing two-person co-op games without a second player.

### \$20 of retro fun

Jakks Pacific has done it again, packaging video game nostalgia into affordable TV doo-dads.

This time, it's Namco TV Games, a handheld box with a joystick that plugs into your TV. Inside are five arcade classics: "Pac-Man," "Dig Dug," "Galaxian," "Rally-X" and "Bosconian." (All right, they can't all be classics.)

The games aren't precisely the same as the arcade versions, which isn't a surprise considering that some of those video game processing chips have been out of production for years. But they look identical.

Like the Atari TV Games product, which had a pile of original Atari 2600 games, expect this to be a novelty that gets picked up and put down quickly.

But for about \$20, this is a great trip down memory lane. See [www.jakksstvgames.com](http://www.jakksstvgames.com).



The hand-held Namco TV Games device plays five classic arcade games.

### YOU ASK, WE ANSWER

#### Don't be left in the dark

Have a question about a game or game hardware? Send it to me, along with your full name and address.

**QUESTION:** Will there be a sequel to "Perfect Dark"? I always thought that was the best shooting game out there. — John Garcia, Toledo

**ANSWER:** You and a lot of other people, John. It was a pillar of Nintendo 64 goodness from Rare, the geniuses that also brought us stellar games like the James Bond shooter "Goldeneye."

Alas, there is no "Dark" sequel on Rare's list of upcoming titles, though Microsoft made an unofficial announcement that there will be one — someday.

Rare became part of the Microsoft Game Studios empire, and its workers have been bending their considerable talents towards producing such Xbox non-blockbusters as "Grabbed by the Ghoulies." But I'm not bitter. Stay tuned for more details as they become available.

**Q: Are they going to make a Version 5 of Namco's "Ace Combat"?** — H. Lewis

**A:** Namco confirms they're working on "Ace Combat 5," though details (including when it'll hit the streets) won't be released until later this spring. The last title was for PlayStation 2 only, but with the well-received Xbox titles the publisher's been putting on the market recently, I'm hoping the developers branch out.

Contact **HEATHER NEWMAN** at 313-223-3336 or [newman@freepress.com](mailto:newman@freepress.com). Find her gaming online as "Gbits."

### NEW THIS WEEK

Most-ordered games going on sale at Amazon.com this week, including title, platform and ESRB rating:

1. "Champions of Norrath: Realms of EverQuest," PlayStation 2. Teen
  2. "R-Type Final," PlayStation 2. Everyone
  3. "Airstrike Delta Strike," PlayStation 2. Teen
  4. "Firefighter 259," Windows. Teen
- Source: Amazon.com Video Games Store

# EVERYTHING OLD IS new again



**JIM SCHAEFER**  
FREE PRESS  
GAME MASTER

You can't rewrite history, but you can replay it.

Two titles from Midway and Activision dig deep into the video game archive, reminding us of why we play games in the first place: Game makers figured out the challenges that still hook us today.

Games are flashier now, but we're still trying to beat the clock, win the race, hit the ball out of the park and take out the bad guy.

"Midway's Arcade Treasures" is sure to bring back memories, or educate you if you weren't around in the 1980s to play games like "Joust," "Defender" and "Paper Boy."

This compilation includes more than 20 classic titles that used to fill the coin arcades. Back then, these games came in refrigerator-sized boxes.

I'd forgotten all about the pterodactyls in "Joust," the game that has you flying around on a big ostrich, jousting with enemies. But as soon as I saw that big bird coming at me, I remembered how to take him down: Hit him square in the kisser.

Both Midway's compilation and "Activision Anthology" are filled with such fond memories. And they include some extra goodies that add to the nostalgia: "Arcade Treasures" features game histories and interviews with developers.

"Anthology" starts you out in a virtual room with an old Atari 2600 and a boombox that blasts a limited selection of '80s music. I smiled when I installed the game on my PC and was serenaded by A Flock of Seagulls.

By taking us back to the days of that early Atari machine, the Activision game goes farther into history than Midway's title. There are 74 games that are so old they carry the very basic titles of "Boxing," "Baseball" and "Ice Hockey." It also includes titles in which games first began to take on personality, like the jungle romp "Pitfall," which features Pitfall Harry.

A nice thing about installing the Activision game is that you don't need to have a big, bad PC. A Pentium II with 128 megabytes of RAM will do.

I had a lot of fun blazing through the old titles, which can be short compared to today's epics. In "Grand Prix," for instance, you simply try to run fast on a track that runs horizontally across your screen. Then you try to beat the clock again and again.

"Anthology" adds some new twists with 16 unlockable modes that transform the original games by distorting the picture, making it spin, etc. I didn't think this added much. The original versions are what I remember. And the games in both of these titles are worth remembering.

Contact **JIM SCHAEFER** at 313-222-5995 or [games@freepress.com](mailto:games@freepress.com).



## Collections take players back to the good old days of the 1980s

### 'Midway Arcade Treasures'

★★★  
out of 4 stars  
Price: \$19.95  
Players: 1 to 4  
Web site: [www.midwayarcadetreasures.com](http://www.midwayarcadetreasures.com)  
Format: PlayStation 2 (also available on GameCUBE and Xbox)  
Category: Multiple  
Rating: T (Teen)

### 'Activision Anthology, Remix Edition'

★★★  
out of 4 stars  
Price: \$29.99  
Players: 1 or 2  
Web site: [www.mumbojumbo.com/anthology.html](http://www.mumbojumbo.com/anthology.html)  
Format: PC  
Category: Arcade-puzzle  
Rating: E (Everyone)

## RECENT RELEASES



**'SONIC HEROES'**  
★★  
Sega for GameCUBE (also available for PlayStation 2 and Xbox), \$49.99. Rating: E (Everyone).

The gaming travails of Sonic the Hedgehog and his crew are legendary for action that roars across the screen at breakneck speeds.

"Sonic Heroes" will satisfy that need for speed. Fans of the supersonic hedgehog's Genesis origins will probably have goose bumps the first time they blaze through some of the 3D loops.

But, alas this ring-collecting journey may be too fast for its own good. It goes from zero to mediocrity in record time.

While the quick platform gaming never grinds to a complete stop, it is often slowed by the potholes of poorly designed levels that seem to drag on forever.

The controls, too, are hit and miss — literally. Sometimes the auto-targeting roll attacks go off without a hitch. Other times you'll whiff and end up tumbling headfirst toward your doom.

What's worse, the game is also hampered by glitches. You'll occasionally get stuck, fall through floors or jump suddenly to a different part of a level. It's frustrating that bugs like these weren't removed from the released product.

Luckily for Sonic, some quality substance complements the flash and dash. The casino stage, for example, is a fun romp as your characters roll through gigantic pinball, roulette and craps tables. The four teams — each with three characters — all offer slightly different quests to conquer (though all have to battle Dr. Eggman's lame robots) and subtle variations in gameplay. And the colorful and cheery graphics and tunes (complete with a "Sonic Heroes" theme song) suit the game well.

"Sonic Heroes" isn't a horrible game; it's just a fun adventure corrupted by shoddy programming and planning. But if you're looking for a mildly entertaining, high-octane jaunt, this game can deliver. Wham, bam, thank you, Sonic.

But remember: Fast doesn't mean fabulous. Speedy? Yes. Heroic? No.

By Ryan Huschka, Detroit Free Press



**'TAK AND THE POWER OF JUJU'**  
★★★★  
THQ for GameCUBE (also available for PlayStation 2, Xbox, Game Boy Advance and Windows), \$39.99. Rating: E (Everyone).

THQ, whose big systems games usually aren't very good, outdid itself with this one. The graphics are superb. The settings are big and detailed: The burial grounds are gloomy, the underground is dark and realistic, and the transportation platforms are colorful. It seems like the creatures are transported by magic, not a machine.

The storyline is good, too. A lowly worker, Tak, turns into a powerful warrior. In this game you collect a variety of things, such as plants, feathers and urbals — little orbs that fly — and you need good strategy to get everything. You don't face many bosses, just little distractions from the urbals.

In the beginning, Tak's master, the Pupanunu shaman Jibolba, tells you the basic story. The old and evil Pupanunu Shaman Tlaloc is turning all the Pupanunu people into sheep. The prophecy says that a great hero will rise and defeat the great evil. Jibolba thinks that the great warrior is Loch, but Loch has been turned into a sheep. That's when Tak's job to restore Loch to a living human begins.

There are many animals in this game. You can ride the rhinos, disguise yourself as sheep and fly like a chicken. Your enemies include many little gremlin-like creatures, chicken worshippers that can hurt you and living plants that snap at you.

One caution: I wouldn't buy this game for Game Boy Advance. That version doesn't have anything close to the features in the games for the larger platforms; you basically just run around hitting bee's nests and collecting orbs. In the GameCUBE version, you have to use your brain: How do I get past this? How do I swing the rope? What angle should I jump on the trampoline to fly up to catch an orb?

I liked this game a lot. A big collecting game like this would be especially good for people who usually play games that are pure adventure and bosses.

By Craig Campbell, II, for the Detroit Free Press



**'DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR'**  
★★★  
Eidos for Xbox (also for Windows), \$45.95. Rating: M (Mature)

"Deus Ex" is a pleasure to play, look at and listen to. And frankly, that's been missing from most shooters released in the last couple months.

You begin as a trainee at a bioengineering corporation, where you've been prepared to accept biological implants that improve your combat abilities — regenerating your health, making you invisible, hurrying your steps and so on.

You select the basic characteristics of your character (sex, hair, face). While you'll almost never see them during gameplay, in thanks to your first-person perspective, you'll see them in every mini-cut scene of dialog.

Depending on the mods you choose, you can be a full-on grunt warrior with Superman-like (or Zena-like) powers or a sneaky Sam Fisher-stealth wanna-be. You can specialize in hand-to-hand combat or rely on your trusty firearms.

The graphics overall are a step behind the newest breathing titles designed for the "box." Still, there's a nice physics engine: You can move objects by bumping into them, and you can pick up and throw so many environmental doodads that there's even an implant to help that ability. Realistic body motions make the action seem smooth and lifelike.

You may notice that the later levels are a bit smaller than the original "Deus Ex," and that upgrading your biomods isn't as sophisticated as the skills system from the last game. There are also far too many waits for loading times. But the overall experience is fun, addictive and immersive.

Your enemies' intelligence isn't always consistent: Some were pretty bright, circling around to find you and scattering when an ally got hit, while others just stood around waiting to get stabbed. But most of the time, it was a pleasant mix.

The few niggling flaws make this "Deus Ex" sequel a high three-star game instead of a four-star gem, but it's still definitely worth buying.

By Heather Newman, Detroit Free Press